

Opening Statement of Bill Delahunt  
Chairman, Subcommittee of International Organizations, Human Rights, and  
Oversight

Hearing on **“Is There a Human Rights Double Standard?  
U.S. Policy Toward Equatorial Guinea and Ethiopia”**

May 10, 2007

The Subcommittees will come to order. Last week the Subcommittee on International Organizations, Human Rights, and Oversight held a hearing with the administration’s chief human rights official, Assistant Secretary of State Barry Lowenkron. Today, the Subcommittee is starting a series of hearings on human rights double standards, examining the different ways the United States treats governments with poor records -- as detailed in the State Department Country Reports on Human Rights Practices and in the studies of Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and Freedom House -- on democracy, human rights, and other rights guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

This initial hearing of this series is a joint hearing with the Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health. It focuses on U.S. policy toward Equatorial Guinea and Ethiopia. I thank my friend, the gentleman from New Jersey, Chairman Don Payne and his ranking Member, also a gentleman from New Jersey, Chris Smith for their willingness to work with us on this hearing. Their records in Congress of promoting respect for human rights in U.S. policy toward Africa are remarkable, and durable. We are pleased to be holding this hearing under their leadership.

This series of hearings on double standards follows from testimony taken by our subcommittee, often in joint hearings with other subcommittees, in a ten-hearing series on foreign perception of the United States. A number of pollsters testified that, contrary to the conventional belief that “they hate us because of our freedoms” and our values, foreigners in general are better described as being disappointed because the United States, in their perception, calls for the observance of democracy and human rights while at the same time providing support to cooperative, but non-democratic, governments who abuse human rights.

When people ask me why we hold so many hearings on foreign opinion -- like my friend the Ranking Member when he asked last week if it was time for the hearing on the opinion of the penguins of Antarctica about U.S. foreign policy -- I reply that it is because those foreign opinions have a real impact on our national interests. We ignore them at our own peril. Not caring what others think is just plain stupid -- it's like walking through a dark room and hoping not to run into a table.

If those same people now start asking me why we are holding so many hearings on human rights double standards, I will reply in much the same way: those double standards, so useful in the short-term for gaining military, economic, and covert cooperation with strong men and dictators, can come back to bite us in two important ways.

\* First, by backing thugs against the aspirations of the common people, we erode our most precious national asset, our standing in the world as a moral leader, the bulwark of democracy and human rights. Both for others and for ourselves, we cannot be a superpower if we are not also a moral power. We cannot be like other major foreign powers operating in Africa, overflowing with grand words about stability and growth, but cynically concerned just with access to minerals and military cooperation.

\* Second, when we support dictators, their citizens, like our forebears in 1776, will not bear suffering forever, and may rise in yet another of those devastating civil wars that are at the heart of Africa's poverty challenge. When dictators, strengthened by outside funding and arms, refuse to cede power through elections, the result can be civil wars in which:

- millions die,
- entire nations, economies, and American export opportunities disappear off the map,
- foreign troops and relief programs, including American troops and American dollars, are needed to restore stability, and
- surrounding countries can find their economies swamped with refugees and shunned by their own and foreign investors.

On both moral grounds and on the grounds of our national interests, these are disastrous outcomes that we must seek to avoid.

Our national interest is composed of many factors, one of the most important of which is our long-term reputation as a champion of democracy and human rights. As one of our witnesses today, Dr. Nyang, says in his written testimony, if our moral currency is not as sound as the dollar, we will be hampered in our ability to build alliances and conduct an effective foreign policy that safeguards our interests.

It appears that at times our desire for short-term military, economic, and covert cooperation, rather than our long-term need to stand with others who are oppressed, dominates our foreign policy. When it comes to getting base rights, we see concern for human rights take a back seat. When it comes to getting mineral rights, we see concern for democratic rights take a back seat. When it comes to cooperation with covert operations, we see cooperation in ending torture take a back seat.

Before we turn to our witnesses to help us with current U.S. policy choices in Africa, let me demonstrate not in theory, but with concrete examples from recent history, why I am so concerned about this issue of double standards. I ask my colleagues to take a look at this first chart, prepared from data on U.S. aid programs compiled by the Congressional Research Service. You will also find the chart and its supporting tables in your committee memorandum.

This chart shows that in the 1980s four of the five largest recipients of U.S. economic and military aid in Sub-Saharan Africa were dictators whose rule led to civil war and even state failure: Sudan, Somalia, Liberia, and Zaire. The primary motivations for this aid were strategic: access to military bases and other forms of military cooperation, support for CIA operations, and access to strategic minerals.

- At the top of the chart, you see Sudan, which received \$3.26 billion in total U.S. aid, much of it at a time when President, formerly colonel, Nimieri was offering concessions to U.S. oil corporations and cooperating with the Reagan administration efforts to topple Libya's Gaddafi;
- Somalia received \$1.56 billion after Marxist President, formerly general, Barre, granted President Carter the use of military bases for the U.S. Rapid Deployment Force for the Middle East. I note that the third country in line there, Kenya, had \$1.55 billion in aid which was

- also related to the U.S. Rapid Deployment Force and its use of the Mombasa naval base;
- Liberia received \$1.12 billion, in return for which President, formerly master sergeant, Doe continued throughout the 1980's U.S. use of the U.S. Navy's Omega navigational tower, as well as the widely-reported CIA operations center for Africa and the Voice of America continental transmitter; and
  - Zaire, now known as Congo, received \$1.07 billion in aid, which came at a time when access to such strategic minerals as cobalt was important to U.S. military production, and when President, formerly colonel, Mobutu was allowing the CIA to send through Zaire its weapons for the UNITA rebels in Angola.

Was it worth it, the short-term strategic benefits we gained from aiding these dictators? I think not. Millions died in the horrific civil wars that broke out in these four dictatorships, and U.S. exports dropped to nothing while American troops were sent to try and end the chaos and suffering in Somalia. I hope that with these hearing we can find a way to pursue our strategic interests without strengthening similar dictatorships today, who might turn into the failed states of tomorrow.

I will leave it to the experts, Mr. Payne and Mr. Smith, to introduce us in their introductions to some of the issues we faced in Equatorial Guinea and Ethiopia, but I hope that this chilling history lesson has made us all a little more wary of the possible results of allying ourselves with repressive regimes.

I would like to acknowledge the presence with us today of Holly Burkhalter, in the early 1980's a staff member of this subcommittee, who in the 1990's, while working as the Washington Advocacy Director for Human Rights Watch, was the first person to point out this peculiar concentration of U.S. aid to Africa on these four dictatorships. Holly, could you stand up so the Subcommittee Members can acknowledge that the staff are always right?

I will now offer a brief introduction of our witnesses, whose impressive and far more lengthy biographies you have in your folders.

In Dr. Sulayman Nyang we have before us one of the world's leading Africanists. In his 33 years as Professor and at times Chair at Howard

University's Department of African Studies he has written so many books -- on Islam and other African Religions and their role in Politics, and on the challenges of democracy and development in Africa -- and advised so many institutions -- from the United Nations to the World Bank to the Smithsonian's African Voice Project -- that it is almost impossible to keep count. Dr. Nyang, we are honored to have you here to help us with these issues.

Lynn Fredriksson is known to many Members of Congress for her role in the 1990's as Washington Coordinator of the East Timor Action Network. There are not many witnesses who can come before us with a record of have been in the front lines of a successful effort to democracy to a land of repression, but that is exactly what Ms. Fredriksson did in helping the East Timor Action Network as it led foreign opposition to Indonesia rule. Now she is the Advocacy Director for Amnesty International USA, an organization that for which I and I dare say nearly every Member of Congress has enormous respect. Ms. Fredriksson, thank you for your past service, and your presence here today.

Dr. Peter Pham is the Director of the Nelson Institute at James Madison University, and a professor in the Africana Studies Department. He is the author of numerous articles and books, including the soon to be released "Africa Matters: Winning the Next Battle Against Terrorism." Among his many contributions to African democracy have been his participation in election monitoring missions in Liberia and Nigeria. Professor Pham, we welcome you as well.

Professor Nyang, you may proceed, but, I urge you and Professor Pham to be careful today. I am told that Ms. Fredriksson is "this close" to getting her Ph.D. and becoming a professor too. Any mistakes, and you could be out of a job!